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General Assembly
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Official Records

54th plenary meeting
Wednesday, 19 November 2007, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Kerim ..... (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Al Bayati (Iraq), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda items 71 and 72 (*continued*)

Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance

Report of the Secretary-General (A/62/324 and Corr.1)

(a) Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/62/72, A/62/83, A/62/87 and A/62/323)

(b) Special economic assistance to individual countries or regions

Report of the Secretary-General (A/62/310)

(c) Assistance to the Palestinian people

Report of the Secretary-General (A/62/82)

(d) Strengthening of international cooperation and coordination of efforts to study, mitigate and minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster

Report of the Secretary-General (A/62/467)

Draft resolution (A/62/L.12)

Assistance to survivors of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, particularly orphans, widows and victims of sexual violence

Report of the Secretary-General (A/62/310)

The Acting President: Before proceeding further, I would like to inform members of a correction to the second line, in the English texts, of operative paragraph 14 of draft resolution A/62/L.12. That line should read "within existing resources, the efforts of the United Nations system and with other", adding the word "with". The paragraph will then continue as reflected in the document.

Mr. Davide (Philippines): Let me begin by expressing the solidarity of the Philippines with the Government and people of Bangladesh at this time of sorrow and suffering that the recent cyclone has caused to their nation. The Philippines expresses its heartfelt sympathy to the victims and assures Bangladesh and its people of the prayers and hopes of the Philippines for their early recovery from this catastrophe.

The Philippines commends and congratulates the Secretary-General on his report under agenda item 71, entitled "Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance" continued in document A/62/87. We fully concur with his conclusions and recommendations in the light of the severity of natural disasters that may be associated with climate change, and the need for special focus on developing countries. This is especially true with respect to their vulnerable peoples, due to the

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difficulties and constraints developing countries have in facing the immediate effects of these disasters, not only in mitigating the inevitable consequences of natural disasters, but also in finding measures and adopting strategies that would make their adaptation to the consequences of natural disasters a less painful experience. At the same time, they must work to ensure preparedness for future occurrences.

The Philippines takes particular note of the Secretary-General's report on humanitarian assistance and rehabilitation for the Philippines, which is included in his report in document A/62/310. My delegation is grateful for the comprehensive narrative of the assistance rendered by the United Nations to the Philippines in connection with the oil spill on 11 August 2006 from a tanker off the south-western coast of the Province of Guimaras, in the central Philippines, close to my own province of Cebu.

I was still in the Philippines when this tragic incident occurred. It was an unprecedented maritime disaster that caused severe damage which will take years to repair and for the affected areas to recover. The Philippines further takes note of the Secretary-General's recommendations and conclusions, which no doubt will send a strong message to the international community for its continued humanitarian support.

My country expresses its gratitude to the Secretary-General for his report on the Philippines and puts on record its debt of gratitude to all those who responded immediately and provided assistance to my country, both bilaterally and through the United Nations system, particularly through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UNICEF, in the post-disaster rehabilitation phase. The rapid needs assessment mission, led by UNDP and involving the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the Office of Civil Defense of the Philippine Government, drafted an early recovery assessment report that proved to be an essential guide to the measures to be taken. All the help extended to the Philippines, especially to those directly affected by the oil spill, lessened the tragic impact of this disaster. It has been said that gratitude is the language of the heart. In that regard, the Philippines' heart is full.

However, in paragraph 60 of his report, the Secretary-General concludes that

> "There is still significant need for additional support in achieving the longer-term objectives that include: full restoration of the damaged environment; further development and strengthening of alternative livelihood programmes; improved disaster risk management; preparedness and mitigation to build disaster-resilient communities; and promoting development in the tourism sector".

Over a year after this unfortunate calamity, the Province of Guimaras, its people and economy are still far from regaining normal life and the promise of a bright future. The oil retrieval operations from the sunken hull of the MT Solar 1 ended in April of this year, with less than 5,000 litres of bunker oil recovered, out of a total of over 2.1 million litres. This means that almost the entire load of oil was dispersed in the pristine waters off Guimaras. It seems difficult to describe this large amount — 2.1 million litres — as merely an "oil spill"; unlike a spill that can be easily cleaned up, the pernicious effects of this event will continue to be felt for many, many years.

We need not dwell on the obvious environmental or human respiratory-related health impact of the polluting oil. It should be noted, however, that the first rapid assessment of the oil spill, conducted by the University of the Philippines in Visayas, also found significant psycho-social effects on normal living conditions engendered by the loss of habitat and the strenuous clean-up efforts. The long-term effects on human health and the environment have yet to be evaluated or accounted for. In terms of the economy, the most direct effect of the oil spill remains the loss of livelihood for the affected population.

A recent study presented last month at the Ninth National Symposium on Marine Science revealed a 65 per cent decline in fish abundance in the waters off Guimaras since the event of August 2006. The Philippine Department of Environment and Natural Resources and mangrove experts also reported the death of at least 600 mature trees in mangroves that serve as breeding and feeding grounds for fish. These findings seemingly validate the observations and complaints of the fisherfolk and residents in the affected areas that their fish catch has substantially decreased.

The local tourism industry also has not recovered from the disaster, as tourist arrivals have decreased in

number compared to previous years. Even though only an estimated 20 per cent of beach tourism was actually affected by the oil spill, other destinations on the island suffered due to the impression that the entire island was contaminated by oil sludge. Unfortunately, even the indemnification provided by the International Oil Pollution Compensation Fund has been described as being insufficient in terms both of the amount and coverage.

Despite this sad, painful reality that I have just described, there is also much to be said for the optimism and resolve of the local authorities and the people of Guimaras to rise above adversity. The international community and the national Government have put in place plans and programmes to help speed up recovery, and the company whose oil caused these problems, PETRON, remains fully engaged in the healing process. It is hoped that, after hearing its name mentioned here, PETRON will do more.

My delegation hopes that the international community and the United Nations system will continue to render assistance and provide guidance, as needed, for the full recovery of the environment and the people of Guimaras. What they will do will also provide hope to other States and peoples who suffer from natural or man-made disasters.

Mr. Čekuolis (Lithuania): My delegation aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of Portugal on behalf of the European Union. In addition, allow me to make the following comments.

Lithuania thanks the Secretary-General for his report submitted for consideration under agenda item 71 (d). We support the findings of the report and welcome the efforts of all relevant parties involved in studying, mitigating and minimizing the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster.

Lithuania has a number of people affected by the Chernobyl disaster, of whom about 6,000 are registered as belonging to the high-risk group and suffering from its consequences, as they took direct part in the clean-up and liquidation of the effects of the nuclear disaster.

Together with relevant non-profit organizations operating on behalf of the victims, the Government of Lithuania is pursuing a number of programmes and activities in the areas of social security and health care for people affected by Chernobyl. Legislation has been adopted to define the juridical status of persons affected while eliminating the consequences of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. Relevant Government decisions provide for compensation to persons affected due to their participation in the clean-up of the nuclear accident or to their relatives in case of the demise of direct victims. If health conditions deteriorate, the persons affected are entitled to repeated compensation. They are also entitled to certain types of free medical treatment.

A national Chernobyl health centre has been established under the Ministry of Health. The centre keeps a database on individuals who participated in the Chernobyl clean-up, organizes regular health care check-ups, offers treatment and advice, analyses and publishes relevant data, organizes conferences on the health care of affected persons, and maintains ties with organizations that deal with radiation exposure issues. A special centre was established for children born to the families of affected individuals.

Some time ago, the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Lithuania adopted the 2006-2010 programme of health care for persons who took part in eliminating the consequences of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, aimed at providing relevant health care and seeking to minimize the rates of sickness, morbidity and disabilities. The programme also aims at contributing to international research on the impact of light radiation exposures. The programme is coordinated by the Chernobyl health centre of the Republic of Lithuania.

Mr. Pramudwinai (Thailand): I thank the President of the General Assembly for convening this joint meeting, which provides us with a timely and useful opportunity to call for the strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance.

At the outset, allow me also to join other colleagues in expressing our sympathy to the people of Bangladesh on its tragic national calamity. May I just add that Thailand has conveyed its deep condolences to the Government and people of Bangladesh and is working on its relief contribution to the people of that country.

The recent catastrophe once again serves as a warning sign on the devastating impacts of uncontrollable natural disasters derived from both natural phenomena and man-made activities. The more severe and frequent natural hazards are alerting us to

call for stronger cooperation in humanitarian assistance.

Thailand welcomes the comprehensive report of the Secretary-General concerning international cooperation on humanitarian assistance in natural disasters, from relief to development. The highlighted significant trends and their humanitarian implications lead us to set priorities in the field of humanitarian assistance and rapid response to disasters. The updated figures demonstrate that a number of hydro-meteorological and geological hazards, as well as epidemics, have increased dramatically. Those natural disasters have unleashed multiple hazards on society, particularly on the poorest, who are the most vulnerable. While provisions for recovery have been and are being provided through various international and national relief efforts, we expect to observe longer-term, well-coordinated and more concrete and concerted efforts to mitigate the impact of natural disasters through disaster prevention and preparedness measures.

Thailand wishes to see an integrated approach on the part of national or regional entities in partnering with such United Nations agencies as the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC)-UNESCO, the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction and the United Nations Development Programme in order to ensure optimal synergies with other related efforts, avoid duplication of work and lead to a more effective and better coordinated response of humanitarian assistance to people affected by natural disasters and emergency situations.

We believe that humanitarian assistance should be firmly based on the actual needs on the ground and appropriate management, and equipped with sophisticated technology and sufficient resources. Strengthening preparedness, coordination and rapid response mechanisms in the wake of a disaster may provide an opportunity to mobilize support for investment in disaster preparedness and mitigation. However, mobilizing the resources involved is always one of the greatest concerns.

Thailand welcomes the establishment of the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) to fill that gap and takes note with appreciation of the timely response it puts on the ground. Thailand has also contributed annually to CERF. The efficiency of fund allocation in the recent case of the Peruvian earthquake last August has proven that CERF is a useful mechanism for generating early and prompt response to disasters and helps solve the problem of financial assistance delays and shortages. We are looking to see that effective response again in the recent case of Bangladesh.

At the regional level, Thailand's $10-million contribution to establishing the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific Tsunami Regional Trust Fund, which is aimed at speeding up ongoing efforts to enhance national capacity and create a reliable tsunami warning system in the Indian Ocean and South-East Asia regions, has already assisted certain regional projects in disaster preparedness and in setting up an early warning system.

The Trust Fund was allocated to the Asian Disaster Reduction Centre for a training programme on community-based hazard map development for India and Bangladesh, as well as to the UNESCO/IOC project for strengthening tsunami warning and emergency responses by providing training workshops on the development of standard operating procedures in 16 countries located along the coastline of the Indian Ocean, from Iran to Timor-Leste. Also, a large portion of the fund was granted to the Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre, which was entrusted at the Phuket ministerial meeting of 2005 as a regional focal point for the tsunami early warning system in the Indian Ocean. It has installed tide-gauge stations in the coastal areas of Myanmar, the Philippines and Viet Nam to form an initial network in detecting tsunamis.

At this time, more than half of the initial budget provided by the Thai and Swedish Governments in 2005 — in the amount of $12.5 million — has been allocated to the projects to which I have referred. Meanwhile, many associated projects are still waiting in the pipeline. The establishment of a comprehensive multi-nodal network thus still requires substantive support from all parties concerned to fully achieve its objectives and further contribute to disaster reduction and mitigation in all regions of the world. Thailand would therefore like to call upon developed countries to make efforts to provide more contributions and technical cooperation related to the development of a natural disaster warning system.

In that regard, Thailand would like to commend the recent pledge of $400,000 by the Government of the Republic of Korea and the $2,000 contribution from Nepalese Government. In terms of technical assistance, Thailand would like to thank the United States for sponsoring the deployment in the Indian Ocean, in December 2006, of the first deep-ocean assessment and reporting of tsunami device, the so-called DART buoy. This sophisticated device will assist in detecting tsunami susceptibly generated by convergent plate movement in the deep sea, which will help to save millions of people living along the Indian Ocean coastline.

At the national level, Thailand was among the 168 countries that adopted the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015. The strategic national action plan for disaster risk reduction is being prepared to provide direction for the country in undertaking disaster risk reduction over the next decade, in accordance with the context of the Hyogo Framework. The plan is expected to lead the country to meet the international safety standards by the year 2017.

I would like to further inform the Assembly that Thailand has paid great attention to the people who suffer the most when disaster strikes. We agree with the Secretary-General's report (A/62/323) concerning the evolving nature of risk patterns, which has implications for exposed groups in low-income settings.

We have made progress in integrating disaster reduction into local communities and school curriculums. Last year, the ministries concerned, in cooperation with the Asian Disaster Reduction Center, launched a project to educate school children in the tsunami-prone area on how to observe and respond to such a disaster. It is crucial to prepare our next generation and to make them aware of and resilient to the increasing multiple hazards that the Earth currently faces. Besides that programme, Thailand also promotes the involvement of local communities and civil society in disaster risk reduction activities through various initiatives — such as the Mr. Disaster Warning programme, community-based disaster risk management and the civil defence volunteers programme. Thailand would be pleased to cooperate and share with other countries its experiences in this area.

Finally, I would like to express our thanks for the work of United Nations organizations involved in humanitarian assistance, as well as donor countries and organizations for their financial and technical support. Humanitarian assistance still requires a great deal of resources, technology and manpower. We believe that all platforms emerging from United Nations initiatives and coordination will lead us to more frequent and fruitful exchanges of good practices and further promote our cooperation in disaster management and humanitarian assistance.

Mr. Skinner-Klée (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to begin by expressing our resolute solidarity with the victims of the most recent natural disasters, notably those that occurred in Bangladesh and Chile last week. The challenges resulting from various events of this year prompt us to speak out today to share some ideas related to our own experience in Guatemala that we believe are important. Before offering some specific observations, however, I too would like to thank the Secretary-General for his thorough and detailed reports, as well as for the recommendations they contain, which serve as the basis for our deliberations.

Thirty-one years ago, my country was taken by surprise and pummelled by one of the most devastating earthquakes in our history, which measured 7.5 on the Richter scale and left more than 23,000 people dead, 76,000 injured and at least 4 million otherwise affected. The scenario is different today, however. We have developed policies, contingency plans and a genuine institutional structure to address the consequences of similar disasters. That represents significant progress with regard to disaster prevention and mitigation. Although the risk of earthquakes persists in various parts of the world — on a scale similar to or greater than in Guatemala — the number of victims and the economic losses are lower today. That can be explained by the fact that assistance today is more reliable as a result of improved capacity to respond, as well as because of a faster response time in providing funding quickly on the basis of better understanding of actual needs and vulnerabilities. As a result, we are moving towards a system that, while not perfect, is certainly better prepared, genuinely capable of helping people in need and more likely to be able to be a part of efforts of States.

It is for that reason that we appreciate efforts to strengthen the coordination of humanitarian assistance

in humanitarian emergencies and disasters on the part of the United Nations system, in particular the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, which has certainly had a very intense year, but one replete with significant achievements.

My Government recognizes the value of the Secretary-General's recommendations contained in his reports on strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance. Many of them are already being implemented in Guatemala through the office of The National Disaster Reduction Coordinator, and regionally throughout Central America by the Coordination Centre for the Prevention of Natural Disasters in Central America.

It is also worth recalling that, in May 2007, Guatemala published a new version of the manual of its Humanitarian Assistance Coordination Centre. The effort to update the manual began with a review of the text and an assessment of our experience during Hurricane Stan in 2005. The main goal of the manual is to guide decision-making and information management in order to coordinate assistance and train all those involved in providing it during a humanitarian crisis.

Addressing humanitarian emergencies must begin with risk reduction and preventive efforts aimed at vulnerable populations. To that end, special attention should also be paid to the issue of gender-based violence committed during humanitarian emergencies. We must also pay close attention to our cultural characteristics and specificities. The age-old community-based traditions of indigenous peoples are crucial to the success of the humanitarian crisis management system as well as to the success of post-crisis recovery, including repairing the social fabric.

That leads me to underscore the crucial importance — once again emphasized by the Secretary-General in his report — of providing humanitarian access. It should be noted that humanitarian access depends as much on the degree of development of local capacities as on personal relationships on the ground. With regard to local capacities, we must bear in mind the lack of infrastructure in some countries, especially with regard to roads in certain regions, which complicates access and creates obstacles to reaching vulnerable populations. We must also remember that access is not an end in itself; it is a tool in ensuring timely humanitarian assistance to the ultimate beneficiaries.

Turning to the issue of financing the rapid response capacity of the United Nations system, we believe that important components are now in place, including the predictability of financing for humanitarian emergencies through the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF). We note that CERF has met many of its goals since its inception. Nevertheless, we must continue to maximize available resources, since such disasters, given their greater frequency and intensity, deplete available resources and reduce response capacity. We must also continue to strive to streamline procedures, increase training, harmonize reporting formats and improve accountability mechanisms.

Finally, we recognize that today more than ever, as the Secretary-General notes in his report, strengthening the coordination and effective planning of humanitarian assistance requires a genuine commitment to cooperation among the various partners participating in the provision of humanitarian assistance. We therefore believe it important that we hold a dialogue on the role and complementarity of humanitarian, political and peacekeeping actors.

This year in particular, we are pleased to note the first meeting of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction in Geneva. It has given us a political forum for discussing the reduction of disaster risk in all sectors and has made it easier to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, particularly as regards poverty reduction and environmental sustainability. Furthermore, we are gratified to participate in the Latin American efforts to evaluate the possibility of establishing a simplified system to respond to emergencies and contingencies arising from natural disasters, bearing in mind our countries' vulnerability to the consequences of climate change. We should also note the valuable momentum imparted to the organization of volunteers who contribute to developing participatory social policies and to mitigating damage caused by natural disasters, taking account of the regional network of humanitarian volunteers created through the White Helmets Initiative as one of the tools of its formation.

That is why the convening of this debate and the adoption of resolutions on this issue contribute to blazing trails for multilateral cooperation, which we believe to be the most appropriate and time-tested way to respond to the current and future challenges to humanitarian assistance.

Mr. Sorcar (Bangladesh): I am taking the floor today against the backdrop of a severe tropical cyclone that has caused extensive damage in my country. The disaster befell Bangladesh before it could recover from two rounds of massive flooding that inundated almost half the country just three months ago.

I would like to record our deep appreciation to the President of the General Assembly and to the representatives who have conveyed their sympathies and assurances of support, in writing or in words, in the hour of difficulty of our nation. We have forwarded their kind words to our capital, which no doubt will be a source of strength and encouragement for our leadership and our people.

The cyclone, named Sidr, hit Bangladesh, particularly its south-western districts, on late Thursday, 15 November, with the severity of a full blown category-four hurricane. It produced winds of up to 150 miles per hour at landfall. Tropical cyclones are no strangers to Bangladesh. Every year, the courageous people brace for storms, but this time even we were overwhelmed by its force and the extent of the damage it caused. It was one of the top 10 fiercest cyclones in the recorded history of the past 137 years. The extent of devastation has been huge. The official estimate of the death toll has risen to 2,048 and is going up by the hour. Many are injured and quite a few are missing. All indications point to the sad possibility that the final number will be higher than what has been possible to confirm officially.

Even in difficult times we brace ourselves in hope. Many people died, but it could have been higher — much higher. In 1991, for instance, when a cyclone of similar magnitude hit Bangladesh, more than 140,000 people perished. Although we are nowhere near the final death count, this time it seems that the extensive preparation of the Government, along with other agencies that worked together, was successful in averting a larger death toll.

Cyclone Sidr originated in a depression in the Bay of Bengal. It had a radius of 300 miles and an eye of 50 miles across. In the 48 hours before the landfall of the cyclone, about 3.2 million people were evacuated to designated shelters and other safe places. That by itself was an enormous feat, as mass evacuation of densely populated coastal areas with poor communications is a huge challenge. However, extensive preparedness and timely action, which have been unreservedly appreciated by many, was instrumental in avoiding a bigger catastrophe.

In addition to the large number of deaths, the cyclone demolished houses, destroyed standing crops, felled trees and damaged shrimp farms — a chief source of livelihoods in the coastal areas. The mangrove forests of the Sudarbans, a World Heritage Site and a natural habitat of the famed royal bengal tiger, have been extensively damaged. Many of the wild animals are obviously in the same danger as people.

The complete damage assessment is still being awaited, though preliminary indications are that 27 million people have been affected by the severe storm. The Government is now focusing on emergency needs: supply of non-food items, food, nutrition, water and sanitation, shelter and disease surveillance. Members of the Defence Forces have been deployed and are working round the clock in rescue and other operations and immediate relief activities. Air Force helicopters have been flying sorties with relief supplies to offshore islands and other inaccessible areas for the past three days. The Navy is also fully involved in relief operations. Cash, food grains and other supplies are being allocated by the Government for assistance. The longer-term perspective calls for the rehabilitation of livelihoods, infrastructure, health, educational and other services and increased shelter capacity.

The severe destruction and human death toll have prompted sympathy and assistance from many countries. Many of our friends have come forward with support; the international response has been great. The United Nations country team, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and many non-governmental organizations have provided support to the Government through extensive emergency response precautions, including mobilizing in-country staff and prepositioned relief stocks across southern Bangladesh.

Many development partners, including the European Union, China, France, Germany, Japan, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States, to name a few, have made early pledges of assistance. We are receiving commitments from others countries, which are standing by the affected population of Bangladesh in its struggle. We are thankful to all countries, organizations and entities

that have stepped forward with assurance, material and moral, in our time of great difficulty.

We received a statement issued today by the spokesperson of the Foreign Ministry, which says that

> "While the resilient people of Bangladesh and the Government are making all efforts to cope with the adversities, at this time we will welcome support from the international community, as before, through the Government, to help mitigate the effects of the disaster."

Time will not permit me to dwell too long on the reports of the Secretary-General. I would, however, like to add a few words concerning the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF). From its establishment in March 2006, it has been a mainstay of emergency response. According to the report of the Secretary-General (A/62/72), the Emergency Relief Coordinator committed $259.3 million to 331 life-saving humanitarian projects in 35 countries in the year 2006 alone. The Fund was also utilized in response to sudden-onset disasters and crises in 24 countries, with 59 per cent of funding going to rapid response to crises in Africa.

We believe the mechanism deserves to be strengthened, as it is the mainstay in many emergency situations. In the short span of time since its launch in 2006, the upgraded CERF has proven its usefulness in many parts of the world, including my own country. We hope that the Fund will continue to receive strong support from Member States, in terms of long-term political support and increased resource flow.

Mrs. Aitimova (Kazakhstan): It is understandable that I should want to express our solidarity and sympathy with the people of Bangladesh on the recent natural disaster, which caused human and economic losses.

At the outset, I would like to pay tribute to the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report on the strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations (A/62/87), which covers multifaceted activities of all United Nations institutions in that field. As the report indicates, the further aggravation of existing emergencies and the increase in the incidence and severity of disasters caused by natural hazards confirm the need to remain focused on strengthening the capacity of humanitarian actors to address the effects of emergencies on the lives and livelihoods of millions of people.

We believe that strengthening cooperation in responding to natural disasters and destruction under the umbrella of the United Nations in accordance with the Hyogo Declaration and Framework for Action 2005-2015 and related General Assembly resolutions, should remain one of the Organization's priority tasks.

Kazakhstan welcomes the positive results of the Central Emergency Response Fund's work during the past year with respect to voluntary contributions by States Members of the United Nations as well as equitable, timely and efficient distribution of these funds.

We believe it is important to increase the coordination and cooperation among United Nations bodies, other international organizations and Governments on the national level, in order to prevent and overcome the consequences of natural disasters for the sake of saving many people's lives. In this regard, we attach particular importance to the establishment by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) of a Central Asian disaster response coordination centre in Kazakhstan. As a further step in strengthening the standby capacities of the United Nations in the region, we propose to establish in Kazakhstan a network of warehouses for the Central Asia region to make relief assets readily available for deployment.

Establishing partnerships, creating capacities within national and local governments, regional organizations and civil society groups, and better defining needs are critical investments in addressing humanitarian vulnerability more effectively in the coming years.

For Kazakhstan, whose territory has been hit by numerous man-made and ecological disasters, such as the dying Aral Sea and the former Semipalatinsk nuclear testing site, solving those problems is an absolute priority. The humanitarian, social and economic consequences of those disasters continue to affect the process of sustainable development not only for Kazakhstan but for the Central Asian region as a whole.

The seriousness of the situation around the Aral Sea highlights the need to take specific steps at the international level to solve the problem. By the 1990s,

the Aral Sea, once a large internal sea, had lost three fourths of its water. That has spelled disaster for millions of people living around it. The salt from the exposed seabed is being sprinkled over the entire Eurasian continent, damaging its environment.

The countries of the Central Asian region have done a lot to rehabilitate the Sea. However, without consolidation of the efforts of the world community, this problem cannot be solved. In this regard, we propose giving the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea the status of a United Nations institution, and we call for an international partnership to develop and adopt a package of measures related to the provision of financial, technical and humanitarian assistance by the United Nations, its specialized agencies and programmes as well as by multilateral financial institutions, in order to rehabilitate the Aral Sea.

This year, the international community marks the twenty-first anniversary of the tragic accident at Chernobyl, the symbol of a catastrophe on the planetary scale. The consequences of nuclear radiation are truly tragic. Millions of people in Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine have been affected by nuclear contamination. This pollution has also affected other countries in Europe. The effects of the radiation fallout continue to have a negative impact on the environment on an even broader geographical scale.

We in Kazakhstan are firmly convinced that the Chernobyl issue should not be considered to be the exclusive problem of those countries that were directly affected by the accident. At that time, my country, like many others, belonged to one country, and many people from the former republics of the Soviet Union — including 30,000 from Kazakhstan — took part in the rescue operation. Many of them lost their lives. Many of them still suffer from the consequences of radiation. The Government of Kazakhstan is taking measures to assist those people who participated in the rescue operations in Chernobyl and has quadrupled the special monthly State allowances for that category of persons.

But much remains to be done. The Chernobyl catastrophe is a global challenge and it should receive a global response. Kazakhstan commends the efforts of the United Nations over the years to eliminate the effects of the Chernobyl disaster in Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine. The international community has provided the affected countries with substantial assistance, although it remains inadequate to their real needs. There must therefore be joint, coordinated efforts on a broad scale to provide assistance for the rehabilitation of the affected populations and for mitigating the environmental, economic and social consequences of the disaster.

Twenty-one years after that tragic day, the Chernobyl catastrophe remains a serious problem for the entire international community. We are convinced that only by combining our efforts and capacities can we eliminate the terrible consequences of the accident and provide a better future for the millions who have suffered its effects. We hope that today's discussion will help mobilize sustained assistance by the international community to the affected people of Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine.

Mr. Heller (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like my first words to convey the appreciation of the Government of Mexico to the international community for the expressions of solidarity and support that we have received regarding the recent flooding in the states of Tabasco and Chiapas in the south of the country, which have over the past few weeks affected more than a million people.

Governments as well as public and private international institutions have supported the intensive efforts of the Government of President Felipe Calderón, and those of local authorities and civil society as a whole, to help our affected compatriots. We have made progress in addressing the urgent needs of the affected population and in identifying the financial and technical resources we need to adopt appropriate measures.

Unfortunately, the emergency is not yet over and we are beginning to see the consequences of one of the worst climate-related disasters that our country has experienced. The economic and social impact on the affected areas will continue to be felt indefinitely. It is calculated that some 350,000 people have lost everything and are now in a situation of extreme vulnerability. On top of that, they face multiple challenges regarding health, housing, food and infrastructure. Thus, given the magnitude of the disaster, we must rely on the support of the international community to complement the actions taken by our Government.

As a country that has been buffeted by natural disasters on numerous occasions, Mexico deeply

appreciates the disaster response work of the United Nations, in particular that of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in channelling humanitarian assistance. Responding to Mexico's appeal, the United Nations system sent a United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination Team from OCHA, whose role it is to support a response, in contact with federal and local authorities, international organizations and civil society. The various agencies in the system are already moving emergency resources for humanitarian assistance and, along with our Secretariat of Foreign Affairs, coordinating international aid to the affected areas.

My delegation reiterates its firm commitment to efforts by the international community to reduce the risk of natural disasters and considers that, given the correlation between these and sustainable development, it is of fundamental importance to strengthen preventive strategies. We express our solidarity with those countries that are currently facing similar dire circumstances, such as Haiti, the Dominican Republic and most recently Bangladesh; we are saddened by the tragedy there.

In spite of technological and scientific progress in the detection and prevention of natural hazards, we must continue to work intensively to identify and mitigate risks as well as the increase the preparedness of society, giving priority to the most vulnerable sectors. No single plan will completely address the effects of such phenomena, but it is possible to intensify, consolidate and continue to develop prevention mechanisms, including the development and ingraining of a culture of self-protection.

For that purpose, we deem it essential to strengthen coordination among Governments, civil society and international humanitarian and development agencies. We also believe that the United Nations has a central role to play in the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action, which needs to be strengthened through concrete measures in order to ensure coherence among programmes carried out by the various United Nations entities and in order to optimize the allocation of available resources.

On numerous occasions, Mexico has stressed the importance of strengthening multilateral mechanisms that respond to humanitarian emergencies in order to make them more effective and expeditious in offering assistance to the victims of these phenomena. The creation of the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) has been, without a doubt, one of the most significant steps taken in that regard. We are pleased to see that, less than two years after its launch, results have met expectations. Mexico is a founding contributor to CERF, and this year it renewed its contribution, thus confirming its commitment to a more transparent and effective humanitarian system, focused on the needs in the field, including those emergency situations that lack visibility.

Concerning the emergency situation in Tabasco and Chiapas, I would like to inform the Assembly that the relevant authorities of the Government of Mexico have accepted the programme of activities to be undertaken with resources from the Fund to support the design of projects related to health, water and sanitation, as well as to coordination, evaluation, planning, monitoring, shelter and logistic coordination. In this respect, consultations regarding the modalities of implementation are under way with CERF.

Along a different line of thought, we consider that the international community's efforts to improve the efficiency and coordination of humanitarian assistance will continue to be limited as long as there is resistance to guaranteeing humanitarian workers security and access to populations in need, particularly in cases where States lack the capacity to offer protection. The issue of access is a cornerstone of resolution 46/182 and a sine qua non for a solid multilateral humanitarian system capable of alleviating the suffering of the millions of persons around the world who, directly or indirectly, face the consequences of humanitarian crises.

Unfortunately, civilians are recurrent targets of warfare. The violence they suffer takes the form of terrible phenomena such as kidnappings, child exploitation and violence and sexual abuse against women and girls. Hence, we have the moral obligation to implement concrete measures to enable the Organization to alleviate these sufferings. Mexico is therefore concerned by the fact that the issue of access to civilians in armed conflicts is being interpreted as a question of interference without considering that this is a fundamental human right of the victims and an obligation, under international law, of all parties.

The protection of human beings affected by humanitarian emergencies, whether they be natural disasters or more complex emergencies, should not be

a controversial issue and should always constitute a common objective towards which Governments and international organizations work together side by side.

Mr. Nsengimana (Rwanda): On behalf of my delegation and on my own account, I want to express deep condolences to the Government and the people of Bangladesh at this very difficult moment.

We welcome the Secretary-General's report on humanitarian assistance and rehabilitation for selected countries and regions, contained in document A/62/310. The Rwanda delegation will focus its statement on assistance to survivors of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, particularly orphans, widows and victims of sexual violence.

The tragic events that occurred in Rwanda in 1994 are among the darkest and most dreadful in human history. Over 1 million lives were lost, and tens of thousands suffered horrific physical and psychological abuse and trauma. Over 300,000 children were orphaned, tens of thousands of women were widowed and thousands contracted HIV/AIDS as a result of rape.

Regrettably, the international community did not take timely and decisive action to prevent the tragic events from unfolding or to stop them when they had started. My delegation's understanding is that the international community's responsibility to protect populations from genocide entails a responsibility to prevent genocide from occurring, a responsibility to protect if prevention fails, and a responsibility to rebuild if protection fails. The agenda sub-item before us enables the United Nations system and the wider international community to exercise their responsibility to rebuild Rwanda after the genocide.

My delegation welcomes the recognition in the Secretary-General's report of the progress that has been made in rebuilding Rwanda after the genocide. The Rwandan people have, for the most part, decided to put their painful history behind them and to rebuild their country on a solid foundation based on reconciliation, justice, good governance, development, human rights and democracy. We commend the international community and the United Nations system for their support for Rwanda over the years.

As the Secretary-General's report correctly points out, significant challenges remain, particularly among vulnerable groups such as orphans and widows. There is a need for continued support to those vulnerable groups of people, particularly in terms of assistance in shelter, health care and education for orphans; medical care and treatment for victims of sexual violence, including HIV-positive victims; trauma and psychological counselling and skills training; and microcredit programmes aimed at promoting self-sufficiency and alleviating poverty among the vulnerable groups.

We wish to commend the Department of Public Information for its work on Rwanda genocide victim remembrance and education, conducted in accordance with General Assembly resolution 60/225. A successful exhibit took place at United Nations Headquarters in April this year to mark the thirteenth commemoration of the Rwanda genocide and was opened by the Secretary-General. Similar activities took place in several other cities around the world.

There is a need for that programme to be continued into the next biennium. The challenges facing the world today — rising xenophobia, racism and ethnic and religious tensions — require that the lessons of the Rwanda genocide be widely taught and disseminated among all people, particularly the young. We therefore call upon all delegations to support the extension of the programme for the biennium 2008-2009.

Finally, I would like to draw the attention of Member States to the decision of the Security Council to begin completing the work of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda in 2008, in accordance with its Completion Strategy. While we commend the Tribunal for the work it has conducted so far, we should recall that there is still a lot left to be done, including the completion of many trials. There are also residual issues relating to genocide survivors, in particular witness and victim support and protection, capacity-building for the Rwandan judiciary, and the transfer of Court documents and records to Rwanda to contribute to genocide victim remembrance and education. Those issues are inextricably linked to the agenda sub-item under discussion, so we look forward to the support of delegations in addressing those issues in the context of a resolution on the sub-item.

Mr. Oosthuizen (South Africa): First of all, let me, like other representatives, express South Africa's deepest sympathy to Bangladesh, which was subject to serious humanitarian disasters recently.

My delegation would like to express its appreciation for the reports of the Secretary-General provided under item 71, which offer a useful analysis of the challenges still facing the international humanitarian community and provide some recommendations to be considered by the General Assembly for our deliberations on this matter.

At the outset, we would like to thank the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), and particularly its Under-Secretary-General, Mr. John Holmes, for the work done to strengthen the coordination of humanitarian assistance in the United Nations, sometimes in extremely difficult situations.

Effective humanitarian coordination is of utmost importance if we want to succeed in assisting the vulnerable. The increasing number of organizations, each with their varying skills and priorities involved in the important task of providing humanitarian assistance, further highlights the need to ensure that all those efforts are provided in an effective and coordinated manner in order to prevent duplication and a waste of resources. We therefore look forward to a further evaluation of the impact and possible success of the cluster approach as one of the measures to provide better leadership and to prevent gaps in providing humanitarian assistance.

The Secretary-General also rightly alludes to the critical role of partnerships and international cooperation in providing assistance during complex humanitarian emergencies. Those partnerships, under the leadership of national Governments, could also include the engagement of regional organizations to help improve humanitarian responses and standby capacities.

We also have to acknowledge that, due to the increase in the scope and severity of the impact of some humanitarian emergencies, many developing countries do not always have the capacity to deal with disaster preparedness, risk reduction and the impact of those emergencies. My delegation would therefore again call on the United Nations humanitarian system to continue not only to assist Member States in their efforts to improve their local and national capacities, but also to assist regional organizations, in order to assure a regional response where emergencies transcends national borders. That would assist Member States in making optimal use of resources in preparing and responding to emergencies, as well as in supporting the resilience of societies in post-emergency situations.

South Africa, as host to one of OCHA's regional offices, is aware of the important work the Office is doing in the region to assist countries facing the challenges of droughts, floods and food insecurity. Continued financial support to the Regional Office for Southern Africa would enable it to improve its support to countries in Southern Africa and to fulfil its mandate.

The report of the Secretary-General further highlights that, despite the many international instruments emphasizing the importance of building capacity to respond to disasters, such capacity remains constrained, mainly due to a lack of funding. Improved financial support is not limited to capacity-building for national Governments, but also extends to the United Nations humanitarian system. South Africa proudly supports the Central Emergency Relieve Fund (CERF) and will continue to do so. At the same time, it eagerly looks forward to the report of the Secretary-General, envisioned for 2008, to measure the successes and challenges facing CERF.

South Africa also recognizes the important role that all parties in complex humanitarian emergencies should play in ensuring the safe access of humanitarian personnel when providing assistance to vulnerable communities, bearing in mind the need for the humanitarian community to respect the culture, traditions and practices of the countries in which they operate. Furthermore, my delegation remains convinced of the need to protect civilians during complex humanitarian emergencies, and also calls on all role-players to address gender-based violence and to make all possible efforts to ensure that adequate measures are put into place to prevent, promptly investigate and persecute acts of gender-based violence.

It is essential, however, to remember that humanitarian assistance should be provided on the basis of the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence, as enshrined in General Assembly resolution 46/182 and other General Assembly resolutions.

The report contained in document A/62/82, entitled "Assistance to the Palestinian People" contains a description of efforts made by United Nations

agencies, in cooperation with Palestinian and donor counterparts, to support the Palestinian civilian population and institutions. We commend the work of the United Nations in that regard and would like to urge the international donor community to continue its generous support. We need to prevent a further deterioration in the quality of life inside the occupied Palestinian territories and a decline of the Palestinian economy, which could only lead to an increase in the economic, social and humanitarian needs of the Palestinian population. In that, regard we need to stress that the crossing points must remain open in order to allow the Palestinian people to receive food, medicines and other important items, especially fuel. It is important that humanitarian assistance be delivered to prevent further suffering and to allow the Palestinian people to live and work in dignity.

The report contained in document A/62/310 highlights the current challenges to the delivery of both humanitarian and relief and rehabilitation assistance by the United Nations and its partners to countries affected by various types of emergencies, particularly in Africa. South Africa would like to encourage the United Nations system, in close cooperation with the respective national Governments, not only properly to identify the specific needs to address the challenges those countries face, but also to provide the appropriate means to implement proposals that will help those countries reach their development goals. It is evident from the report that, in many instances, Governments have taken responsibility in identifying challenges, but that international support, in its various forms, is needed to assist Governments to help alleviate the plight of the vulnerable in their respective countries. We should accept that responsibility.

We are also aware that, after the period of immediate emergency relief has passed, there is often a bigger and more arduous task ahead: to rebuild and bring normalcy back to the affected populations. We therefore appreciate the Secretary-General's report entitled "International cooperation on humanitarian assistance in the field of natural disasters, from relief to development" and would like to highlight the critical element of continued involvement of all relevant role-players in the early recovery phase, with the aim of creating favourable conditions for sustainable development. The importance of finding lasting solutions to wars and conflicts would also clearly contribute to the sustainable development of countries. We further call upon relevant humanitarian and development actors to strengthen tools and mechanisms to ensure that early recovery needs are considered as part of the planning and implementation of humanitarian response activities. The importance of sufficient funding to help affected communities in their recovery efforts also remains critical.

In conclusion, South Africa remains firm in its unwavering commitment to improve the working of the humanitarian system in an effort to provide better assistance faster, in a more coordinated and predictable manner, and based on the principle of partnerships. It is our hope the international community will continue to provide assistance in a manner that will take the needs of the affected communities into consideration, and not only based on financial considerations.

Mr. Rees (United States of America): The United States continues to support a stronger and more effective international response to humanitarian crises. Over the past two years, we have been proud to help approximately 1 million African refugees to return home, thanks in large part to collective activism, democratic action and financial assistance. The United States is also working actively with other Governments to resolve the protracted situation of refugees, such as the Bhutanese in Nepal. In particular, we have responded to the joint Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees-UNICEF appeal for the education of Iraqi children in Jordan and Syria with $39 million to date, and we have made almost $200 million available in 2007 to assist displaced Iraqis.

The United States is conducting active humanitarian diplomacy critical to improving conditions for beneficiaries of assistance around the world — in Africa, the Middle East, the Americas, Asia and Europe. We recognize the importance of preparedness for all types of disasters, we believe in accountability and quality in humanitarian assistance, and we emphasize that international assistance must support and strengthen national and community capacities, rather than undermine or override them.

We have again seen a year of activity and change — change that we hope will prove to represent progress — in the realm of humanitarian reform. Examples include the application and strengthening of the cluster approach to respond to the needs of the internally displaced, the humanitarian coordinator

system, and the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF).

The United States continues to see progress in the use of the cluster approach and the consolidation of support among donors, implementing agencies and affected States. Clarity of responsibility through the assignment of coordination roles for humanitarian activity has strengthened overall United Nations leadership and responsiveness in humanitarian crises. We continue to stress the importance of the participation of non-governmental organizations at all levels of coordination, including the cluster approach.

In its first full year of activity, the Central Emergency Response Fund has proved to be an effective tool for rapid response to humanitarian emergencies and has provided critical early funding for United Nations operational engagement in emerging crises. It also continues to provide a valuable access point for the participation of new donors in global humanitarian operations. While we continue to assess CERF's value in addressing "under-funded emergencies", we remain open to discussion and development of clearer definitions and criteria to govern disbursements in those situations.

Unfortunately, protracted civil conflicts continue to create some of the worst situations of forced displacement in our era. Renewed displacement in the eastern Congo and in the Sudan's Darfur province are tragic reminders that civilians are at times deliberately targeted by some of the belligerent parties in a conflict. Despite improved systemic responsiveness to internally displaced persons, access remains a key issue. Humanitarian agencies cannot assist people they cannot reach.

The safety and security of humanitarian workers, like those of the civilians they seek to assist, is often jeopardized, at times deliberately, by some belligerents. As the United States delegation has stated previously, without full and unhindered access for humanitarian actors, even the most robust response effort will fail to meet emergency needs. Deliberate attacks on humanitarian workers remain a significant impediment to life-saving aid in many crises, and we must all work together to guarantee the safety and security of relief workers, as well as of civilians.

I want to reaffirm the strong support of the United States for neutral, impartial, independent and robust responses to humanitarian needs around the globe. To that end, we look forward to working with Sweden as co-chairs of the Good Humanitarian Donorship programme and to working with other States on strengthening needs-based assessment, improving coordination at the central and field levels, and reviewing best practices and performance measurement. We would welcome other donor Governments, including new or emerging donors, to join the initiative and incorporate its principles and best practices into their policies as well.

In conclusion, the United States would like to join others in expressing our deep sympathy to the people of Bangladesh for the loss of life and the damage caused by the recent cyclone. That disaster and other humanitarian emergencies present grave challenges, but they also bring to mind the collective strength of what we like to call our "international community".

We must measure the effectiveness of our efforts in providing humanitarian aid not by how many statements or plans we make — not even by how many dollars we spend — but by how many lives we save and by how many people, their lives devastated by unspeakable natural or man-made disasters, have had their suffering alleviated and their burdens lightened. By uniting in the face of dramatic adversity, as the international community did following the 2004 tsunami and in response to the earthquake in Pakistan, we can save lives and help the afflicted. We hope the United Nations, and particularly the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, will continue to play a central role in galvanizing this cooperative response.

Mr. Tharyat (Indonesia): Let me begin by expressing, on behalf of the people and the Government of Indonesia to the people and Government of Bangladesh, our deepest sympathy and solidarity with respect to the recent disaster that hit the country.

I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive and detailed reports, particularly that on strengthening emergency relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction, recovery and prevention in the aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster, as contained in document A/62/83.

As one of the victims of the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster, Indonesia is highly appreciative of and deeply encouraged by the continued attention of

the United Nations and the international community to that issue. We join other delegations in expressing appreciation for the efforts undertaken by Governments, international organizations, civil society and the private sector in providing support in humanitarian and disaster relief, and in assisting countries to make the transition from relief to development.

Nowadays, rarely do we see a month go by without a major disaster reported in the public media. The increased incidence of disasters, as reported in the Secretary-General's report in document A/62/323, suggests that the frequency and intensity will likely continue into the future. That creates a major challenge, particularly for developing countries, in pursuing national and international development objectives.

While natural hazards do not discriminate, it is important to recall that the poor are the most vulnerable and often endure the greatest cost. In effect, as the report rightly emphasizes, disasters contribute to vulnerability and persistent poverty, which later undermine efforts in development and the achievement of the international development goals. The carnage of the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster three years ago profoundly demonstrates the high vulnerability of poor communities to natural disasters. It also underlines the importance of paying serious attention not only to emergency relief, but also to the disaster risk reduction required as part of development efforts.

Viewed in that context, while countries affected by the tsunami disaster, including Indonesia, on the whole have made progress in their reconstruction efforts, it will still take many more years to attend to disaster risks to affected communities. Furthermore, alongside the ongoing efforts to rebuild and recover from the tsunami, the main mission now is to rebuild better. The survivors of the disaster not only expect the recovery efforts not simply to restore communities to their pre-tsunami conditions, but they also desire greater capacity to be established and to be prepared for future calamities.

Let me also add that, as part of the reconstruction efforts, it is important that the valuable lessons learned be shared as much as possible. In our experience during the tsunami and the reconstruction of the affected areas, one of the main lessons learned was the importance of close coordination on the ground, from the emergency phase to the present phase of rehabilitation and reconstruction.

The tsunami-affected countries, although facing different recovery timetables, still share the common challenge of long-term recovery. In that connection, I would like to emphasize the following.

First, while tsunami affected countries have progressed in rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts, the support of the international community, donor countries and financial institutions, as well as the private sector and civil society, is still very crucial in the medium- and long-term. Secondly, continuing the objective of rebuilding better is essential to the affected communities, particularly in improving the quality of and strengthening local capacity in disaster management. Thirdly, prevention efforts through tsunami early warning arrangements in the Indian Ocean and South-East Asia should be continually evaluated and strengthened.

In the light of those considerations, Indonesia will introduce a draft resolution entitled "Strengthening emergency relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction and prevention in the aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster". The proposed text follows from previous resolutions on this issue, and hence seeks the generous support and sponsorship of Member States.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks to all the delegations that actively took part in the negotiations on the past resolution, as well as to the representatives of the Secretariat for their valuable advice. We look forward to the Assembly's continued support.

Ms. Blum (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*): Permit me at the outset to express, on behalf of the Government of Colombia, our deepest sympathy and solidarity with the Government and the people of Bangladesh on the loss of life and suffering caused by the cyclone that recently struck that country.

My delegation takes note of the reports submitted by the Secretary-General at the sixty-second session on humanitarian assistance of the United Nations.

Colombia welcomes the important humanitarian role played by United Nations agencies, funds and programmes in various regions of the world. My delegation encourages the system to continue to strengthen that mission, with full respect for the guiding principles of humanitarian assistance. In

particular, we must uphold the neutral and impartial nature of humanitarianism and respect the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as the primary role that the State must play in organizing, coordinating and implementing the provision of humanitarian assistance on its territory. We must bear in mind that it is primarily up to States to exercise leadership in this area. My delegation notes with satisfaction that the reports refer to the importance of improving relationships with national authorities and of strengthening local capacities. Such references are found in analysis concerning disaster situations and the coordination of humanitarian assistance.

It is important that humanitarian entities — in particular the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and its subsidiary entities — increasingly highlight the role of affected States in this area. If we are to find lasting and effective solutions to humanitarian situations, it is important not only that we strengthen inter-agency coordination, but also, and in particular, that we ensure their coordination with Government entities. Thus, humanitarian cooperation can be tailored to the structures, plans and programmes of beneficiary States, providing coordinated assistance and better responses and achieving effective coverage without duplication of efforts.

This also applies to the cluster approach. In that context, the Secretary-General indicates the need to enhance support for national and local authorities and structures in the humanitarian field. Colombia wishes to reiterate that, while this approach is the subject of intergovernmental analysis within the United Nations, together with other issues of reform and system-wide coherence, its implementation should be promoted only when States themselves request and authorize such implementation.

We must also improve information systems in order to achieve more effective results in this area. With regard to needs assessment, coordination with Governments is also important, for two main reasons. First, it helps States to develop their own needs-assessment systems, which they need so that they can define their own programmes and develop a sense of ownership of their activities. Secondly, when national institutions have reliable and developed information systems, their assessments should serve as a basis for determining existing needs and the most appropriate assistance activities for each context.

Humanitarian assistance should contribute to the design and implementation of processes that enable us to repair the social fabric of affected populations and to assist in the development of economic structures that guarantee sustainability once the critical difficulties have been overcome. Humanitarian assistance should also be based on State coordination.

Colombia has programmes that assist disaster victims and provide comprehensive support to persons displaced by situations of violence. Those programmes incorporate the relevant international standards and include the components of prevention, early warning, emergency humanitarian assistance, access to State social services and programmes and support for social and economic stabilization.

The assistance plan for persons displaced by situations of violence contains an additional important component: protection for human rights and voluntary returns. The plan is implemented in a decentralized manner and includes a beneficiary registration system that has gradually been improved to correct identified shortcomings. The 2007-2010 budget for the plan's implementation totals approximately $500 million per year. Additionally, in the context of demobilizing illegal armed groups, we are promoting a strategy aimed at compensating victims, which is essential to rebuild the lives of displaced persons.

Because emergencies can exceed the capacity to act, Colombia complements its efforts with international cooperation activities. Various agencies of the United Nations system, other Governments, the International Committee of the Red Cross and various cooperation entities contribute to the implementation and improvement of national policies and work with State institutions on humanitarian fronts. In such work, it is important to ensure that there is always synergy, consistency with national plans and coordination with the activities of national and local authorities on the ground.

In conclusion, I reiterate Colombia's position that it is important to strengthen strategies that facilitate the transition from emergency assistance to development. At every stage of the process, humanitarian assistance — in the sense of emergency aid — must be considered temporary, and must place priority on measures that go beyond relief and lead to lasting solutions. That objective can be attained only with support by the system's agencies for the creation and

strengthening of local capacities, which in turn must be based on full respect by all for the norms, programmes and needs of the beneficiary State.

Mr. Olhaye (Djibouti): At the outset, we wish to express our sincere sympathy to the people of Bangladesh, who are struggling to cope with one of the worst cyclones in a decade. Already, more than 2,000 people are dead, but the true scale of disaster is such that it is feared that thousands more may have perished. In the midst of this calamity, we should not lose sight of the effectiveness of the Government's early warning system, which enabled a vast number of people — more than a million coastal dwellers, at the least — to flee to shelter. The Government's response system was also extremely effective and immediate. We have a lot to learn from Bangladesh.

I wish to express the gratitude of my delegation to the Secretary-General for his reports for this meeting. Equally, we wish to express our appreciation to Ambassador John Holmes for his assertiveness, his passionate commitment and his enlightened leadership in guiding the work of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). Whatever the reason, whatever the cause, natural disasters are on the rise, and the direct consequence of that has been an exposure to greater levels of loss of life and property and material damage. Unfortunately, our world has not been short of armed conflicts, particularly in Africa, which continue to force the displacement of millions of people into suffering and insecurity. Quite often, they are denied access to humanitarian aid. In all of these cases, OCHA is at the forefront of efforts to galvanize acutely needed assistance and to plan coordination and strategy during complex emergencies.

Growing numbers of people around the world are increasingly exposed and vulnerable, both to natural disasters and to complex emergencies. None of these adversities confine their destructive qualities to single countries or regions. As the report of the Secretary-General notes,

> "The spread of humanitarian emergencies across international borders is a common phenomenon, prompting humanitarian consequences on a regional scale ... .
>
> "Natural disasters often affect multiple countries simultaneously ... .
>
> "These are telling examples of how the spillover effects of individual conflicts and disasters deepen humanitarian problems and further complicate the delivery of assistance." (A/62/87, paras. 18, 19 and 20)

These developments strengthen the realization that we all inhabit this earth together; while today's catastrophe may not affect you, there is no guarantee what tomorrow's will bring.

My country's economic and social development efforts have been constrained by insufficient water supply; extreme climatic conditions, particularly endemic aridity; severe droughts; and occasional flash floods. Djibouti is deeply concerned over these developments and wonders if they are the initial opening events of the predicted global warming effects in sub-Saharan Africa. As the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warned, the most pronounced consequences of the worsening global climate change will be felt in Africa. Already, we in Africa are witnessing spreading shortages in rainfall, droughts, expansion of deserts with their consequent population dislocations and food shortages. On the other hand, when rainy seasons do arrive, although they are shorter, we can expect severe flooding and damage to infrastructure.

What we can gather from all this is the need for each of us, within our respective capabilities, to develop and expand our ability to deal with risk and adversity. Disaster preparedness, or lack thereof, makes the difference in the final analysis. However, as the Secretary-General indicates in his report, only a small five per cent of global humanitarian funding is allocated for disaster relief. Much more needs to be done to provide additional preparedness funding to the pooled funds and humanitarian funding mechanisms, including consolidated and flash appeals and emergency funds of various agencies and non-governmental organizations.

The final topic I wish to mention is the establishment of the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF). This has been a great step in the right direction to ensure the provision of timely and reliable humanitarian assistance to victims of natural disasters and armed conflicts. Djibouti is proud to contribute, however symbolically, to the CERF. We feel we have a duty to share, however small it may be, in the mitigation of global disasters that impact on our lives.

Mrs. Park Enna (Republic of Korea): At the outset, Sir, let me express the deep condolences of the Government and people of the Republic of Korea to the Government and people of Bangladesh on the huge disaster that cyclone Sidr has caused. We sincerely hope for early recovery through an enhanced humanitarian response on the part of the international community, in close coordination with the Bangladeshi Government.

Looking back on the past year, we have had both good news and bad news in the field of humanitarian assistance. The good news is that progress has been made on key initiatives, as duly noted in the report of the Secretary-General report in document A/62/87. First of all, the establishment of the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) has been very successful, and system-wide coherence is being discussed throughout the United Nations Organization. Furthermore, many initiatives have been tested and have proven their validity, including the cluster approach and the humanitarian coordinator system. Partnerships for humanitarian assistance are also growing, and the Secretary-General's report noted that there is an ongoing dialogue to improve civil-military coordination.

As one effort to strengthen partnerships in the Asia-Pacific region, the Republic of Korea hosted the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Donor Support Group (ODSG) Partnership Meeting, which was held in Seoul on 12 and 13 June. The meeting was an opportunity for OCHA donor countries and the countries of the Asia-Pacific region to pool their wisdom and explore ways to enhance cooperation in the field of humanitarian assistance.

Unfortunately, we also face enormous challenges. Significant trends that may impede humanitarian assistance include rising urbanization, climate change, increasingly severe natural disasters and the growing threat of pandemics.

Bearing in mind these challenges, my delegation welcomes the report of the Secretary-General concerning system-wide coherence in the areas of development, humanitarian assistance and the environment (A/61/836). We believe that it provides a sound basis for moving forward with reforms, and we encourage that practices aimed at strengthening system-wide coherence be put into effect as soon as possible.

In this process, the Secretary-General's role is crucial. He should continue to show initiative and strong leadership as he spearheads the reform process. We also believe that the international humanitarian system must adapt to climate change. The recent discussions of the high-level meeting on climate change should, therefore, be incorporated into our system-wide coherence response.

The Republic of Korea also strongly promotes gender mainstreaming in every humanitarian response and throughout inter-agency coordination. Women and children are more vulnerable in emergency situations; indeed, they account for the majority of victims in such circumstances. In particular, we are gravely concerned about the serious situation of sexual violence deliberately directed against women in many emergency situations. In this regard, we believe that the Emergency Relief Coordinator, relevant United Nations entities and Member States should strengthen their efforts to address the issue of sexual violence in their humanitarian activities.

As we all know, we can never have enough funds to satisfy every demand for humanitarian relief. Considering the practical limitations, my delegation believes that it is vital to distribute funding and assistance based on assessed needs. This approach is possible only if needs assessments are provided. Such assessments can help to ensure that assistance is effectively tailored to specific regions or States. For example, the ODSG Partnership Meeting in Seoul noted that in the Asia-Pacific region, natural disasters have a far greater impact than armed conflict, as shown by frequent flooding in Asia, including in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Indonesia, Viet Nam and the Philippines this past summer, and most recently in Bangladesh. Indeed, our region has accounted for 73 per cent of worldwide deaths due to natural disasters since 2000. That is why we need to pay more attention to risk reduction and preparedness.

Factors such as these should be carefully considered when decisions are made about the kinds of aid and assistance to provide. We believe that the United Nations should enhance its support of risk reduction and preparedness initiatives at the regional and country levels.

Another factor to take into account is humanitarian access. As the Secretary-General rightly pointed out, humanitarian access to populations in need

is a prerequisite for all humanitarian efforts. It is each Government's task to secure access to the field of emergency in its country. It is regrettable that some countries are intent on discouraging humanitarian actors from gaining access to regions in need.

In an effort to provide prompt, systematic and coordinated emergency relief abroad, the Republic of Korea enacted an International Emergency Relief Act in March 2007.

I will conclude by expressing my country's belief that the internationally agreed development goals and a human rights approach should be guiding beacons in our efforts to provide humanitarian assistance. The Republic of Korea takes this opportunity to reaffirm its pledge to work towards increased cooperation in improving and strengthening the United Nations system of humanitarian relief and assistance.

Mr. Shinyo (Japan): At the outset, we express our heartfelt condolences to the people of Bangladesh for the huge loss of life and the severe damage caused by the recent cyclone disaster. We feel compassion and are ready to work for the relief of the people in Bangladesh, together with the international community.

Japan welcomes the ongoing efforts to advance humanitarian reform, which will make for a more effective provision of humanitarian assistance and protection for those in need. We commend Under-Secretary-General Holmes and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) for the work they have done, together with other humanitarian partners, to strengthen the coordination of United Nations humanitarian and disaster relief assistance.

Every humanitarian organization must learn lessons from what has happened in the past and become even more expert at responding quickly to humanitarian emergencies. For that, leadership is needed on the part of the Emergency Relief Coordinator who, we hope, will continue to work vigorously to meet the challenge. For its part, Japan will continue to do its utmost to promote humanitarian reform.

We wish to underline three points today. First, with regard to humanitarian reform, it hardly needs to be said that the United Nations family is one of the largest bureaucracies in the world. Every bureaucracy, including the United Nations, has problems: rigidity, for example, or sectionalism, or being slow to spring into action when called upon. The humanitarian community of the United Nations has initiated an effort to address those issues, however, and we appreciate that.

We support the developments that are taking place, including the establishment of the Central Emergency Response Fund and the introduction of the cluster approach and humanitarian coordinators. These constitute a useful attempt to strengthen the Organization's humanitarian structure. There remains much to be done, but we hope the end result of strengthening leadership in the field will be that whenever the United Nations acts to provide humanitarian assistance, that assistance will be coordinated and coherent.

The reform process must be broader than that, however. We are facing a variety of challenges, for example, with regard to internally displaced persons, the response to "forgotten" crises, the safety and security of humanitarian personnel, the improvement of needs assessments and ensuring humanitarian access. Those are challenges facing the entire international community, and all Member States must therefore address them.

We wish to emphasize the value added to humanitarian reform by the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Towards a United Nations humanitarian assistance programme for disaster response and reduction: lessons learned from the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster" (A/61/699). It contains useful recommendations, and we would like to request the United Nations to adopt those that the Secretariat can manage to implement internally.

Secondly, we would like to underline the need to increase our investment in the transition from relief to development, as proposed in the report of the Secretary-General's High-level Panel on United Nations System-wide Coherence. Japan agrees that we must work to achieve a seamless transition, and it recognizes that one important purpose of the informal consultations on system-wide coherence is to address that transition issue. I would add that the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security, which OCHA manages, is a useful financial resource for effecting such a transition, and we would like to consult with others on how best to use the Fund to that end.

The challenge of transition also relates to peacebuilding in post-conflict countries. Peacebuilding

covers a variety of issues, including humanitarian assistance, the peace process, security, reconstruction assistance and nation-building, and the Government of Japan, in its Official Development Assistance Charter, has declared it of vital importance. As chair of the Peacebuilding Commission, we would like to make the maximal contribution to that body so as to produce a concrete and useful outcome as soon as possible by deepening the strategic discussion in the Commission and strengthening coordination with other entities, including the World Bank.

Thirdly, we would like to mention again this year the urgency of disaster reduction. The consequences of hazards can be substantially mitigated by taking appropriate disaster reduction measures. By building a society that can survive a major disaster, we can reduce the risk and also the magnitude of its consequences. We need to exert as much effort for risk reduction as we are currently exerting in providing a humanitarian response to disasters, and we need to do it comprehensively, by improving prevention, preparedness, enhancing response capacity and strengthening capacity-building in parallel. Humanitarian personnel, too, must address risk reduction as a part of the provision of assistance.

The Government of Japan is of the view that risk reduction is a priority in promoting human security and a vital pillar of sustainable development, and that it also has a critical bearing on how the world adapts to climate change.

As a nation with extensive knowledge and technology relating to disaster reduction, Japan has been actively involved in international cooperation in that area and wishes to continue that involvement. At the Asian-African Summit in 2005, for example, Japan announced that it would provide more than $2.5 billion over five years in assistance for disaster prevention, mitigation and reduction measures in Asia, Africa and other regions.

The target the international community must strive to achieve is clearly described in the Hyogo Framework for Action adopted at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction, held in Kobe in January 2005, and we need to work towards it steadily and effectively.

From that viewpoint, we welcome the establishment of the Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery of the World Bank, and the first meeting of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction, held in June. We also welcome the development of such regional initiatives as the Tsunami Warning System, coordinated by the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO.

We commend humanitarian personnel for carrying out their difficult responsibilities, often under severe crisis conditions. And we condemn the intimidation and killing of those who are fighting so valiantly for the well-being of others. We must do everything we can to ensure their safety. Most of all, we need to advance humanitarian reform, standing on the side of the people who are affected, including refugees and internally displaced persons, as they so desperately need our assistance. I assure the Assembly that Japan will do its part.

Mrs. Bhandari (Nepal): On behalf of the delegation of Nepal, I wish to express our appreciation for the reports of the Secretary-General submitted in connection with agenda item 71.

The world regularly faces challenges such as disasters, refugees, conflicts and other humanitarian crises. Recently, we have seen the devastating cyclone in Bangladesh. On behalf of the people of Nepal, I wish to express our sympathies to the Government of Bangladesh and to the victims of the cyclone. We hope that the international community will provide the assistance requested in response to this disaster. We believe that the United Nations has an important role to play in coordinating humanitarian and disaster relief assistance in these situations.

The lessons from past disasters tell us that the humanitarian response would benefit from a more systematic approach. In particular, the United Nations system can play a more proactive role in risk analysis, early warning and the coordination of response to humanitarian and disaster situations. We believe there is a need for a more sustained mechanism to secure resources for disaster and humanitarian response including through the Central Emergency Response Fund launched last year.

Humanitarian and disaster relief assistance faces many challenges including problems of access, coordination, safety and security of personnel, and the lack of adequate resources. Humanitarian personnel often face various threats to their safety and security, sometimes of even deliberate attacks and hostage-taking. Nepal deplores such attacks and calls for a

stronger mechanism for protecting the safety and security of humanitarian and other United Nations personnel.

Though the primary responsibility for protection of United Nations staff rests with host Governments, the United Nations system should do all it can within its reach to enhance the safety and security of its humanitarian and peacekeeping personnel.

The Department of Safety and Security should enhance its capacity to analyse threats to the safety and security of United Nations personnel and to devise a mechanism to prevent such threats. In particular, its capacity to negotiate during crises, such as in hostage-taking situations, needs improvement. There is a greater need for coordination among the United Nations system, Governments and non-governmental humanitarian agencies for handling the humanitarian aspects of disasters, refugees and internally displaced persons resulting from conflicts.

As a country prone to disasters such as earthquakes, floods and landslides, Nepal attaches great significance to the work of the United Nations in the area of humanitarian and disaster response. The Government of Nepal has given high priority to disaster prevention, mitigation, relief and rehabilitation and has integrated these concepts into development planning. However, we need more sustained support for strengthening our national capability in disaster and humanitarian response.

Nepal is committed to providing relief and rehabilitation to the victims of the decade-long conflict in accordance with the Comprehensive Peace Accord signed in November 2006 between the Government of Nepal and the Maoist Communist Party of Nepal. Pursuant to this agreement, the Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction is working in coordination with relevant actors for the safe return of internally displaced persons to their homes and for returning land and property. Nepal would highly appreciate greater international assistance for efforts towards the relief and rehabilitation of the victims of the conflict and for the reconstruction of its infrastructure destroyed during the conflict.

We hope that the current dialogue among the political parties will lead to an early finalization of the dates for elections for the Constituent Assembly. With these and other developments in the peace process, we are confident that the humanitarian plight of the people of Nepal affected by the conflict of the past will be healed in the days to come.

In conclusion, Nepal is committed to work with other Member States to strengthen the coordination of United Nations humanitarian and disaster relief assistance all over the world.

Mr. Tarragô (Brazil): My delegation joins other delegations in conveying the condolences and solidarity of Brazil to the people and Government of Bangladesh with respect to the calamity that has befallen that country.

Brazil has increased its efforts to provide humanitarian assistance to areas and populations affected by natural disasters and complex emergencies. Those actions are taken in the context of our solidarity and commitment to the promotion and realization of human rights and development for all. They also represent for Brazilian society an opportunity for joint action in humanitarian affairs in a form of participation that is a requisite for the full realization of democracy.

The assistance provided to victims of the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2005 and the repatriation of Brazilian nationals from Lebanon as a result of the conflict in 2006 are recent examples that signal a new phase in Brazil's involvement in international humanitarian assistance, both in terms of the volume of the assistance delivered and in reaching far-flung areas.

Naturally, our assistance has been felt in neighbouring countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. In the past two years, Brazil has contributed resources or sent medicines, food and specialized personnel to eleven countries in the region.

My country has also granted refuge to an unprecedented number of people from Palestine. In 2007, it resettled in its territory more than 100 Palestinian refugees affected by the crisis in Iraq. We have done so in cooperation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

In order to make Brazilian humanitarian officials better acquainted with the United Nations system and practices, Brazil hosted in March 2007 a seminar on international humanitarian assistance, with the presence of the Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, the Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator and the President of the White Helmets Initiative from Argentina, who exchanged valuable

information with our civil defence and federal and regional authorities.

We have taken note of the Secretary-General's conclusion that the requests for humanitarian assistance are likely to increase, which will require additional efforts from member States and non-governmental organizations. We concur with the Secretary-General's view on the need for a multilateral, comprehensive and urgent response to address climate change, which has a direct bearing on many of the emergencies we have faced and will still have to face in the future.

We deem especially important the engagement of actors at all levels in the response to emergencies. We must therefore strengthen local, national and regional capacities so as to ensure a timely and adequate deployment of resources.

No less important than the engagement of relevant actors is coordination on the ground. We learned with interest of the results achieved so far by the cluster working groups. We look forward to a comprehensive evaluation of the merits of applying the cluster approach at the field level.

Despite the unexpected nature of many emergency situations, a preventive approach is possible and is ever more important. We support initiatives focused on risk reduction and preparedness, especially in vulnerable areas and communities. The unmatched experience of the United Nations in emergency situations must be fully shared so as to enhance local and national capacities. On the other hand, best practices at the local level must be incorporated into the expertise of the United Nations.

From our own experience in our territory, we have realized the crucial role played by community-based organizations and civil society, including NGOs, in rescue, rapid response and recovery. Their participation in the coordination efforts with Governmental agencies will greatly contribute to the effectiveness of the response system as a whole. For example, a Latin American and Caribbean network of psychological assistance in cases of emergencies and disasters was recently created by civil society with Governmental support.

The Central Emergency Relief Fund (CERF) has proved to be an important tool in responding to emergency situations. We are glad that the Fund is well on its way to reaching the goal of $500 million in resources. Brazil contributed to the Fund this year and expects to make a higher pledge at the high-level conference in December. We look forward to the results of the independent review of the Fund in 2008.

We wish to highlight the importance of unhindered access of humanitarian personnel to affected areas. We deplore the fact that, particularly in situations of armed conflict, this access is sometimes deliberately denied. Such denial is a violation of international humanitarian law, and, in many cases, implies violations to the international human rights law and refugee law. The State is responsible to protect its own population and this responsibility includes, in our view, ensuring access of humanitarian personnel to the affected people.

We remain concerned with the continued risks faced by humanitarian personnel around the globe, particularly in complex emergencies. We regret to learn from the September 2007 report of the Secretary-General on the safety and security of humanitarian personnel and protection of United Nations personnel (A/62/324) that some 4,000 incidents had taken place in the previous 12 months. Arrangements and policies must be adopted in order to provide both United Nations and locally recruited staff with adequate safety and security. Furthermore, crimes against humanitarian personnel can not remain unpunished: those responsible must be brought to justice.

One aspect that deserves our best attention is the transition from relief to development. In this regard, we believe that the Hyogo Declaration and the Hyogo Framework for Action should be fully implemented, in particular the commitments to assist developing countries, especially the more vulnerable and the disaster-stricken countries, towards sustainable development. States should be encouraged to strengthen their capacities, enact appropriate laws and pursue sustained, nationally-owned strategies to enable them to cope with the effects of disasters. In this endeavour, cooperation between States, the United Nations system and other relevant organizations is very important.

We would like to once more draw attention to the need for a revised and more comprehensive approach to humanitarian issues, one that goes beyond the dichotomy of providers and beneficiaries, donors and recipients, and financial aspects.

In many cases, developing countries, particularly those in the neighbourhood of conflict-stricken areas, provide substantial contribution, as they usually absorb massive refugee flows and bear the high economic and social costs of regional humanitarian emergencies. Developing countries should therefore be assured broader participation in decision-making and policy supervision of humanitarian affairs. Brazil remains committed to working towards that end.

Mr. Carmon (Israel): Allow me to congratulate the President on his able stewardship of the General Assembly. In the interest of time and brevity, I intend to condense the agenda items applicable to my delegation into one statement.

At the outset, my delegation wishes to extend its heartfelt sympathies to Bangladesh, which was recently hit by a disastrous cyclone. We offer condolences to the Government of Bangladesh and to the countless families who have lost loved ones, and we hope the humanitarian efforts to mitigate this severe natural disaster will continue to provide support and aid to the millions obliged to flee their homes and left devastated and destitute.

Coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance is a matter of grave importance for the United Nations. Israel, over time, has developed well-known and specific expertise in rapid response assistance and disaster management and views it as a responsibility to share these practices with the international community. When disasters strike — be they earthquakes, tsunamis or political conflicts — the first few days are often the most critical for life-saving activities. Hence, in the past, Israel has deployed rapid response, emergency search and rescue and medical teams to natural disasters in our region and around the world. To mention just a few cases in recent years, these include disasters in Armenia, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Sri Lanka and Turkey.

Regarding the statement delivered earlier today (see A/62/PV.53) by the Palestinian representative in connection with the report of the Secretary-General on assistance to the Palestinian people (A/62/82), it is regrettable that he once again focused on rhetoric and politics rather than on reality and meaningful solutions to the matters at hand. Surely, there are numerous complexities involved in considering the situation in our region, taking into account Israeli security and Palestinian stability. The internal violence among the Palestinians that we have witnessed lately has squandered too many opportunities for progress. The same applies to the continuation of daily Palestinian terrorism, among other factors. No one can detach himself or herself from this very stark reality, although, amazingly enough, the statement we heard earlier today did.

As many in this Hall are aware, due to the important choices made by the Palestinian leadership, there is a Government today that meets the standards of the international community. Hence, if we look at the reality on the ground, there are a number of initiatives and projects aimed specifically at providing assistance to the Palestinian people. But the statement made today by the Palestinian representative seems to ignore these important developments.

Consider the astronomical difference between my Palestinian colleague's politicized narrative and the reality on the ground. One reality on the ground is a sewage project, under the direction of the World Bank, under way in Beit Lahia in the Gaza Strip to alleviate a strain on the current cesspools near the village. Israel is working to expedite the building of the plant by tracking down non-metal pipes to be used in the facility.

Another reality on the ground is that, as of today, more than 230 Palestinian trainees in fields such as public health, small business, agriculture, educational planning and empowerment of women and youth are enrolled in projects and seminars sponsored by Israel through its Centre for International Cooperation (MASHAV). Hundreds of others have participated in similar programmes over the past 15 years.

Another reality on the ground is Israeli and Palestinian business leaders holding meetings, such as those between the Israeli Manufacturers Association high-level forum and its Palestinian counterparts, and the Portland Fund's initiation of an Israeli-Palestinian Chamber of Commerce. Yet another reality on the ground is that Israel has released, contrary to what we have heard today, approximately $250 million in tax and customs revenues, with the remaining sum, nearly $250 million more, to be transferred by the end of the year, in accordance with Palestinian wishes and instructions.

These are merely a few examples of practical steps being taken to assist the Palestinian Government and to create a better environment for progress. Israel

believes that this Palestinian Government provides a new opportunity to move forward in the peace process and realize the two-State vision, which is why it has eased movement and removed checkpoints in the West Bank, allowed Palestinian security forces deployment and consented to the transfer of supplies and equipment to those forces.

But no assistance will ever come at the expense of Israeli security or permit actions which would endanger the lives of our citizens. May I remind the Assembly that, while just yesterday Israel considered the release of 441 Palestinian prisoners as a gesture of goodwill, a barrage of more than 20 mortars was fired into Israel from the Gaza Strip.

The Palestinians must realize that Israeli security and safety are in their own national interest. As long as the rockets continue to fall on the people of Sderot and other Israeli cities, the crossings cannot operate properly. Terrorism is to blame for restrictions on the crossings and on access. Hence, taking responsibility for its security is the first and foremost step for Palestinians in order to see the promise of a new tomorrow.

With regard to draft resolution A/62/L.12, entitled "Strengthening of international cooperation and coordination of efforts to study, mitigate and minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster", Israel is pleased to be a sponsor and to join in the consensus, and we affirm the importance of wide and active international cooperation and coordination in mitigating the consequences of such accidents for the lives and health of all people.

Nevertheless, my delegation wishes to put on record, for the purpose of consideration at a later date, a matter of related concern. It is our hope that in the future draft resolutions on this item will deal not only with those affected in the countries and geographical areas, but also with all populations who once lived in the area of a catastrophe and were adversely impacted by such a disaster. Whether or not individuals have chosen to remain in the original area of a catastrophe is largely irrelevant to the fact that they continue to suffer and to bear the consequences of the disaster. In the specific case of Chernobyl, many individuals and families migrated to other countries. For instance, Israel has absorbed approximately 100,000 migrants from the Chernobyl area over the years. Hence, they too should be entitled to the same access to information and be included in research, studies and materials published on the health, environmental and socio-economic consequences of the Chernobyl disaster, especially those commissioned by United Nations entities.

Since draft resolutions on this item will be considered on a triennial basis beginning next session, my delegation has sought the opportunity to place our concerns on record in the hope that they will be raised for discussion during the next negotiations.

Mr. Mohamad (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to express our admiration for the excellent manner in which Mr. Kerim has been guiding the work of the General Assembly.

I would also like to express our feelings of sympathy and solidarity with the Government and the people of Bangladesh with regard to the recent natural disaster there. We would ask the delegation of Bangladesh to convey to the Government and the people of that country our deep sympathy and condolences.

I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for the exhaustive report contained in document A/62/87, on the "Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations." We also wish to hail the efforts made by the relevant agencies and organizations active in the humanitarian sphere, such as the International Organization for Migration, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) — which deserve special mention — that are supported by national organizations, civil society sectors and associations that work to accelerate the access of those affected by crises to assistance.

In order to meet the global challenges of today, including humanitarian issues, we need broader understanding to strengthen cooperation and coordination with national institutions. The world is now seeing an increase in natural disasters and man-made ones. Some of the disasters recur under conditions where joint coordination and early warning mechanisms are required and those recurrent catastrophes have led to what we call the globalization of human disasters that cross national borders and thus multiply their dire effects.

In that regard, the Government of the Sudan would like to reaffirm the importance of complying with the guidelines for humanitarian assistance, including, neutrality, independence, transparency, integrity and respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of a country.

The role of the States at the regional level is essential in complementing the efforts of the United Nations through the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. The regional role of States is exemplified by the experience of the Sudan in this regard. The Sudan has hosted the largest organization for emergency assistance in the world, Sudan Lifeline, to coordinate humanitarian assistance with the help of the national Government. On the basis of that experience and in addition to United Nations assistance in Darfur, the Sudan signed a humanitarian protocol in March 2007 with United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, John Holmes. That had a positive effect and facilitated the accelerated provision of humanitarian assistance to Darfur through the fast-track system.

The Sudanese Government has created a high-level committee to follow-up on the implementation of that protocol. The committee includes representatives of the United Nations and its specialized agencies, as well as representatives of donor countries to follow-up on the implementation of the protocol. The effects of the stabilization of humanitarian assistance — as is clear in the reports of the Secretary-General on the provision of humanitarian assistance — are reflected in the stabilization of malnutrition statistics, the reduction of mortality rates and the stabilization of public health rates, with the result that there are no epidemic diseases in the region at the current time.

That could not have taken place without cooperation and coordination between the United Nations and its specialized agencies and the Government of the Sudan and its important national organizations. At a time when we affirm the importance of humanitarian assistance for man-made disasters, the United Nations must, by the same token, give greater attention to peaceful sustainable solutions.

While we commend the report of the Secretary-General (A/62/87) on humanitarian conditions in Darfur, we wish to comment on certain parts of the report, especially paragraph 15. Regions where humanitarian access has been stagnant because of the lack of security are the areas where rebel movements are in control. Those are the only areas that witness attacks on humanitarian workers. The Secretary-General's reports to the Security Council have indicated that the rebel movements are the ones that carried out those attacks.

My delegation wishes to express its greatest appreciation and gratitude to all of those who have taken part in humanitarian assistance to Darfur.

The experience of the Central Emergency Response Fund, as indicated in the report, has demonstrated the importance of providing assistance in areas beyond traditional channels, by giving immediate assistance to meet the appeals made to answer the challenges in areas that need to be stabilized. That underscores the need for joint action and development assistance, which, through rapid and small response projects would encourage return from camps to the original regions. It also emphasizes the importance of complementarity in humanitarian assistance and the need for development in order not to rely on assistance alone, but also to provide a smooth transition from assistance to development and rebuilding.

The report of the Secretary-General highlighted in its recommendations the importance of strengthening cooperation between the United Nations and regional and non-governmental organizations. While we reaffirm the importance of non-governmental organizations in the humanitarian sphere, we should say that some NGOs are using humanitarian assistance as a front to carry out objectives other than humanitarian assistance.

Very recently, we saw an attempt by a French non-governmental organization to use a humanitarian action as a front to try to remove Sudanese and Chadian children and smuggle them away from their homes and take them abroad in the guise of humanitarian assistance. Such alarming action on the part of some NGOs leads us to ask that all parties comply with humanitarian guidelines in order to achieve the desired objectives.

We would like to strengthen coordination of United Nations humanitarian assistance in order to address recurrent and complex cases of emergency in various parts of the world.

Ms. Rodríguez de Ortiz (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): We wish first and

foremost to express the solidarity of the people and Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela with the victims and their relatives in Bangladesh, who have just been affected by the recent tragedy of cyclone Sidr that caused many deaths.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela attaches particular importance to humanitarian and emergency assistance in the case of disasters at the international level. In that context we wish to reaffirm resolution 46/182 of December 1991, which sets out the guiding principles of United Nations humanitarian emergency assistance. We must work towards global mobilization to create greater awareness of the true magnitude of the problems and threats we are facing. That includes reducing the risks of disasters. We must involve all actors: not only all levels of Government, but also all relevant international, regional and subregional organizations. We must move from words to action. Venezuela is convinced of the need to promote all activities in our region that will enable us to reinforce that idea. We have our conscience and the tools we need to move forward. We have no excuse. The international community can count on my entire country as a natural ally in this struggle.

At the national level, there is the commitment of the President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and a national civil protection and disaster management organization, established by the constitution. Since February 2005, we have mandated that body to strengthen preventive actions before disasters occur. Thus, we have moved from disaster management to risk management in order to present a solid, cross-cutting and multisectoral platform composed not only of governmental decision-making bodies, but also entities with a definite impact: private companies, non-governmental organizations, volunteers and the community itself. We have established a national risk management commission, whose primary objective is to reduce risks of a structural or non-structural nature. We have also established the Simón Bolívar Humanitarian Task Force to strengthen disaster prevention and assistance efforts. Breaking with the assistance-based paradigm of such bodies, we have made it a multidisciplinary and multisectoral unit focused on risk-reduction activities. Thus, we have moved from the damage and needs assessment approach, which characterizes emergency response organizations, to an approach based on risk and needs assessment, which addresses specific risks of all kinds at the national level.

This human team is based in five regions of our country, where it participates in humanitarian assistance efforts at the international level in Central America, the Andean countries, the Amazon region, the Caribbean and the rest of the world. In addition, the organization has a national, state and municipal fund that provides financial support for disaster prevention and assistance activities. For example, it has participated in activities in Bolivia, Cuba, Dominica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica and Suriname, as well as in efforts to support displaced Lebanese citizens evacuated during the hostilities in that brotherly country last year. In addition, we are favourably considering providing humanitarian assistance in response to requests by the brotherly countries of Chile, Bangladesh and Mexico. In Bolivia, we participated both before and after the 2006 floods in preventive actions that helped to reduce the damage caused.

The organization is also working to identify, assess and monitor disaster risks and to strengthen early-warning systems through the national disaster prevention and assistance centre. This is the technical-scientific component of the national civil protection and disaster management organization, which enables us to monitor and process national information on disaster risks with a view to decision-making in the area of prevention and emergency assistance.

Likewise, we are making great efforts in the area of formal and non-formal education. Through educational programmes in which local communities are being trained to protect themselves, we are teaching such communities to organize, plan and develop risk and disaster management programmes at the local level. The national Government is also working to reduce underlying risk factors through educational missions, including literacy instruction and training at the basic, diversified and university levels, thus incorporating a large population excluded from the educational system. These programmes include comprehensive training in civil protection aimed at risk and disaster management. Other social missions in the areas of health, nutrition, housing, energy and indigenous populations, inter alia, are firmly committed to reducing the high levels of poverty and marginalization that have existed in our country and

that, as in many other parts of the world, are increasing the frequency of disasters.

Moreover, we are actively participating in and supporting the activities of relevant regional and subregional organs, including the work of the High-level Conference on Disaster Reduction organized by the Association of Caribbean States, held in Haiti last week from 14 to 16 November. We participated in order to demonstrate our conviction that we must strengthen our prevention, mitigation and response capacities in order to reduce the risks of disasters and that it is our generation's duty to support such activities.

Another important aspect that we should highlight is the recent visit to Venezuela by a delegation from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), led by Ms. Margareta Wahlström, Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator for Humanitarian Affairs. The visit, which was an unqualified success, further strengthened our relationship with that specialized agency of the United Nations.

Finally, the delegation of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela believes it is important to reiterate the request made to the Secretary-General for a detailed report on OCHA's disbursement of funds in support of humanitarian assistance activities and the impact of such activities in countries affected by natural disasters.

The Acting President: I now call on the observer of the Observer State of the Holy See.

Archbishop Migliore (Holy See): At the very outset, I wish to convey sincere condolences to the people and the Government of Bangladesh in the wake of the terrible cyclone that left thousands dead and millions with property and livelihoods in ruins. Our appreciation goes to all those who responded immediately to the humanitarian emergency.

The utter destruction that we have just seen in Bangladesh illustrates the many devastating effects of the natural and man-made disasters confronting peoples all over the world year after year. Men and women working for international, national and local humanitarian organizations — many of which are faith-based — risk their lives and their future to aid the victims of such catastrophes. It is for the safety of those humanitarian workers and for the welfare of the suffering people whom they assist that we must work for a truly effective, coordinated and humane disaster-response system.

Last year, the high rate of natural disasters around the world was, sadly, accompanied by many extremely costly man-made ones. Armed conflicts have devastated societies in many places, taken lives, ruined economies, set back development and frustrated efforts to restore peace. Given the terrible consequences of armed conflict, we must once again recall that, in the unfortunate case of war, all parties involved must comply fully with the rules and principles of international law and international humanitarian law related to the protection of humanitarian personnel, such as allowing full and unimpeded access by humanitarian personnel to all people in need of assistance. Likewise, those same parties are under obligation to guarantee safe and unhampered access to humanitarian aid to civilians and all victims of armed conflict.

Member States have focused increasingly on the need to prevent and reduce risks associated with disasters. The adoption of the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015 demonstrated the commitment by countries to place preparedness and prevention on a par with response and recovery. This policy is particularly relevant at the national and local levels. By increasing the knowledge and capacity of local actors to respond effectively to emergency situations, countries can reduce the long-term cost and consequences of a disaster. Local civic and faith-based organizations are highly effective in this regard, and thus must be fully engaged, supported and, when necessary, duly protected.

The position of the United Nations within the international community puts it in a key position to coordinate humanitarian response to disasters. For this response to be effective, the Organization needs the full cooperation of the States directly concerned, especially in ensuring that the latter fully comply with their obligations under international law and international humanitarian law, and that they fulfil their responsibility to protect their own people.

Moreover, as humanitarian agencies grow in number and variety, the United Nations could enhance collaboration among them and harness their complementary capacities, while respecting their differences and the specific aims and principles of each

organization. We note with interest the work done in this regard by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee.

Long-term and sustainable post-disaster recovery continues to be a challenge and a necessity. While individual Governments are responsible for developing long-term recovery strategies, collaboration with local agencies is important, in particular with those that have acquired concrete knowledge of the situation and have a long-term deployment of resources in the region. This could cushion unintended harmful effects, especially on the more vulnerable sectors of society, due to the transition from emergency humanitarian assistance to the recovery phase.

Finally, long-term recovery requires the continued interest and support of the international community. An outpouring of good will and international solidarity most often follow live reports and images of humanitarian disasters; but as attention and resources move to other priorities, it quickly weakens or even disappears. This could be very costly, especially in post-conflict situations in which the probability of a relapse into violence is very high, or in places where a truly catastrophic natural disaster could wipe out the economic base of entire communities.

A steady commitment is necessary if a sustainable and long-term recovery system of peoples and regions affected is to be achieved. We therefore welcome initiatives to highlight often-forgotten humanitarian situations and underfunded humanitarian efforts throughout the world.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.